

Fiscal Year 2010 Annual Report



SEPTEMBER 2010

1. Introduction

The Alexandria Environmental Policy Commission (EPC) was established under Chapter 4, Article M, of the City Code to "advise and make recommendations to the City Council and, where appropriate, to the Planning Commission and City Manager." This report provides a summary of EPC's activities during Fiscal Year 2010 (FY10), which were primarily focused on the initial phases of implementation of the *Environmental Action Plan 2030*. This report also describes EPC activities outside of the Eco-City effort, including service on several additional commissions and hosting the City's annual Earth Day festival.

2. Who We Are

The Alexandria City Council established the EPC in 1970 to advise and make recommendations to the City Council and City Manager, where appropriate, on matters relating to the following:

- · Clean air
- · Land use
- Noise pollution and abatement
- · Pesticides, herbicides and contaminants
- Solid waste
- · Water quality and supply
- Other matters referred to the EPC by the City and citizens
- Other topics relating to the conservation and protection of Alexandria's environment

The EPC consists of 13 members, including five members from the field of environmental sciences, five citizen-at-large members, one member from the field of urban planning, and one member with experience in Federal or state environmental statues/regulations. This year, the additional position previously held by a high school student was converted to a position to be held by a representative from the Alexandria business community. The Commission is supported by the City of Alexandria Department of Transportation and Environmental Services (T&ES), Office of Environmental Quality.

The table below identifies the Alexandrians who served on the EPC during FY09.

Scott Barstow (Chair)	Patrick Hagan
Danielle Fidler (Vice Chair)	Patricia Hilgard ^{1,2}
Jennifer Hovis (Secretary)	Rebecca Jablon ²
Peter Pennington (Earth Day Chair)	Laura Medhurst
David Boxer ¹	Kurt Moser
Patrick Brennan ²	Joy Pochatila ¹
Jessica Bayliss Brown	Matt Voorhees ²
Kristopher Croghan ²	Phil Voorhees
Keith Freihofer ¹	

¹Membership expired during FY2010.

²Membership began during FY2010.

3. Eco-City Alexandria

The primary focus of the EPC during this fiscal year was to initiate implementation of the Eco-City *Environmental Action Plan 2030* (EAP). The EAP was formally adopted by City Council in June 2009, and it outlines the goals and activities that will help the City and its residents achieve the vision outlined in the Eco-City Charter. The charter, which was the first of its kind in the region, outlines the City's guiding principles and vision for a sustainable Alexandria.

The EAP establishes general policy goals, identifies specific action steps, sets tentative timelines and develops measures of success. These goals serve as the bridge between the Charter's sustainability vision/principles and the specific actions (e.g., policies, programs and projects) that may be undertaken by the City, EPC, and the community in the coming years. The plan contains 48 goals, 50 preliminary targets and 353 actions spread across the ten principles initially identified in the charter.

- Land Use & Open Space
- Water Resources
- Air Quality
- Transportation
- Global Climate Change and other Emerging Threats
- Building Green
- Solid Waste
- Environment & Health
- Energy
- Implementation

Early in FY10, the EPC identified a number of cross-cutting focus areas to initiate implementation of the EAP. The focus areas described below were determined to be the highest priority items for FY10 during the annual EPC retreat in September 2009.

Environmental Indicators

The city's *Environmental Action Plan – 2030* calls for the development of concrete metrics and indicators to measure residents' use of environmental resources. [Principle 10 – Implementation, Goal 5 – EPC Roles and Responsibilities, Short Term Actions: "The City and EPC will establish an annual report card on key environmental quality and performance metrics, and on action steps accomplished by the City and will publish these results."] The development of environmental benchmark indicators was also called for under the revisions made this year to the City's Strategic Plan.

Measuring and regularly updating key indicators of resource use and environmental performance will make it possible to directly evaluate the city's environmental performance, and will help educate citizens regarding their resource use; many environmental problems are attributable, in large part, to a lack of individual awareness of rates of resource use and their impacts. In 2010, EPC worked with the City's Environmental Coordinating Group to develop a list of 16 environmental indicators to measure the annual progress of the Eco-City Alexandria initiative and Environmental Action Plan 2030:

- 1. Number of days with code red/orange air quality
- 2. Per capita energy use
- 3. City operations energy use
- 4. Greenhouse gas emissions by City government
- 5. Greenhouse gas emissions by residents and businesses

- 6. Number of (square feet of) green buildings approved and built
- 7. Percent tree canopy
- 8. Number of acres protected since approval of Open Space Master Plan in 2003
- 9. Percent waste diversion rate
- 10. Public transit ridership number of mass transit commuters per year
- 11. Total passengers per mile and per hour of service
- 12. Per capita water use and waste water treated
- 13. Number of stormwater best management practice projects (BMPs) in the City
- 14. Number of respiratory health complaints received by the Alexandria Health Department
- 15. Percentage of full service restaurants that are totally non-smoking
- 16. Percentage of population living in a walkable community

The intention is for City departments to produce statistics for these indicators and submit to the EPC on an annual basis to be included in its annual report to Council. EPC will work with Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) on the possible inclusion of one or more additional indicators focusing on ACPS environmental performance.

Urban Forestry Projects

The EPC is exploring opportunities to develop volunteer community tree-planting and maintenance projects that accomplish some of the mutual objectives of the Environmental Action Plan and the Urban Forestry Plan adopted by Council in June 2009. EPC members held a series of exploratory meetings with staff from the City Arborist office, the Department of Parks and Recreation, and Alexandria City Public Schools to develop ideas for projects on ACPS property that would add to the City's urban tree canopy, providing shade, habitat, and a range of ecosystem-services and educational benefits. We hope these discussions will lead to implementation of one or more pilot projects on ACPS property in the 2011 fiscal year.

Community Outreach Activities

The EPC has continued to participate in a variety of community events in order to conduct outreach on the Eco-City Alexandria and the potential role for citizens in carrying out the EAP. For example, EPC members staffed a table at Del Ray First Thursdays, the Art on the Avenue festival, and the Bike to Work Day pit stop at Market Square. Efforts are also underway to develop standardized materials to be used when conducting outreach to civic groups and homeowners associations.

Green Business

A subgroup of EPC members has initiated research on various green business certification programs that are already in use around the country. The recent addition of a new EPC member representing the Alexandria business community has provided valuable insight on sustainability issues that are of chief importance to local businesses. The subgroup has been working closely with the Alexandria Food Safety Advisory Council and the Health Department to sponsor an *Eco-Friendly Restaurant Expo* in September 2010.

4. Other Issues

City Staff provided continuous updates to the EPC on other developments in the City, such as the settlement and subsequent engineering studies for the Mirant Potomac River Generating Station, the development of the North Potomac Yard Small Area Plan, and the transportation and environmental impacts of the BRAC/Washington Headquarters Service development at Mark Center. During FY10, the EPC worked with several other City commissions and groups to address water quality, energy, air quality, green building, transportation, and open space issues facing the City.

Members of the EPC continued to serve in an official capacity on the following City commissions and working groups:

- Mirant Community Monitoring Group
- · Earth Day Planning Committee
- Waterfront Committee
- Transportation Commission
- Stormwater Working Group
- ACPS Superintendent's Environmental Advisory Committee
- Four Mile Run Joint Task Force

In addition to formal representation in the above organizations, EPC members routinely participated in meetings with respect to the following groups or City projects:

- BRAC Advisory Group
- Potomac Yard Planning Advisory Group Transportation Subcommittee
- Wayfinding Stakeholders Advisory Group
- Environmental Coordination Group
- Beauregard Small Area Plan Committee
- Partnership for a Healthy Alexandria
- Green Building Working Group

ACPS Superintendent's Environmental Advisory Committee

During the year, members of the EPC have played a major role serving on this group, advising and linking ACPS activities to the principles of Eco-City Alexandria. As such, this committee has become a very active committee with an overview of all matters environmental. Possibly the biggest step taken by ACPS was the appointment, in February 2010, of an Environmental Steward in every public school in the city. These stewards are volunteers from the existing school staff, and the Advisory Committee is now busy giving them guidance and resources to carry out their roles in ensuring the environmental message reaches every student. In the mean time, work is forging ahead on energy conservation issues, the use of alternative energy sources and the construction of green roofs and green classrooms in multiple school facilities.

Green Food Resolution

In March of this year, City Council adopted a progressive Healthy Food Resolution, expressing support for an array of steps to increase the healthiness and sustainability of Alexandrians' food. EPC endorsed this resolution, and is especially proud that it was developed by a newly-organized group of concerned citizens interested in food sustainability and quality issues. The group has already held two events focusing on sustainable food production, and is working locally to increase residents' access to community supported agriculture and community gardens.

EPC looks forward to collaborating with and supporting the work of the healthy food resolution citizens' group, the Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria, the Alexandria Health Department, the Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities Department, Council, and others to advance the initiatives contained in the resolution.

Strategic Planning Process

Beginning in October of 2009, the City updated and revised its Strategic Plan. Following extensive public input, the revised Strategic Plan was adopted by Council in June of 2010. EPC participated throughout this process. Of the seven goals contained in the Strategic Plan, our work focused primarily on Goal 2 ("Alexandria respects, protects and enhances the health of its citizens and the quality of its natural environment."). EPC helped develop, and supported the adoption of, the second objective listed under Goal 2:

Objective: Maintain and improve the quality and sustainability of Alexandria's environment.

Initiatives:

- Improve ambient air quality in the City through emissions reduction programs and by educating the community about air quality issues.
- Implement the recommendations of the Urban Forestry Master Plan and move toward reaching the American Forest's suggested goal of 40% tree canopy and ensure the sustainability of Alexandria's urban forest by promoting tree planting on public and private properties to produce a multi-aged, diverse tree community.
- Develop and implement a plan to support the achievement of Citywide greenhouse gas emission reductions to below 2005 levels.
- Expand and enhance the City Green Building Program including incorporating green building practices into existing structures.
- Continue to implement the strategies identified in the approved Open Space Master Plan, including its current, measurable actions to protect an additional 34 acres to reach the 100-acre goal for open space.
- Expand the City's recycling programs to exceed the State requirements and achieve a diversion goal of 35%.
- Enhance the ecological integrity of waterways by maintaining and improving storm water and sanitary infrastructure and stream system health to minimize environmental impacts.
- Develop a series of environmental benchmarks, indicators and performance measures for the City and community that quantifies progress towards sustainability.

Similarly, EPC supported the adoption of initiatives under the third Goal 2 objective ("Support healthy lifestyles and disease prevention."):

- Increase community education and outreach efforts for Eco-City related activities focused
 on sustainability, such as energy and water conservation, green buildings, Eco-City audit,
 behavioral changes etc. and improve coordination across the City.
- Increase access to safe walking and biking trails in the City.

EPC strongly supports the environmentally-related "headline indicators" referenced for Goal 2, which include: walk score for the City, miles of bicycle trails and shared pathways, number of "Air Quality Action" days, rate of recycling, and acres of open space.

We also support Goal 3 ("A multimodal transportation network that supports sustainable land use and provides internal mobility and regional connectivity for Alexandrians."), and its objective of ensuring safe and accessible travel for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users, and of increasing transit options for residents. Council adopted several important "headline indicators" for this goal, including:

- · Number of transit passengers per year
- Percentage of people taking public transportation to work
- Passengers per mile and per hour of service
- Vehicle miles traveled per 100,000 population
- Traffic fatalities per 100,000 population
- Number of station entries/exits at Alexandria Metrorail stops
- Share of walking and bicycling trips as measured by the U.S. Census in the American Community Survey, Metropolitan Washington Council of Government (MWCOG) Region
- · Household Travel Survey data

Several of the Strategic Plan's indicators and initiatives track those included in EAP-2030. EPC applauds City Council for its reiteration of support for these important goals, initatives, and indicators relating to the livability and sustainability of Alexandria, and we look forward to working with Council to ensure that they receive the attention called for by their inclusion in the Strategic Plan.

Adopt-a-Block

After reaffirming its commitment to the City's Adopt-a-Block program last year, the EPC conducted extensive cleanups of King Street between Interstate 395 and Quaker Lane in July 2009, December 2009, and May 2010. Additional cleanups will continue on a quarterly schedule in FY11.

Cross-Regional Coordination

In November 2009, the EPC held a meet-and-greet with the Arlington Environment and Energy Conservation Commission (E2C2). The E2C2 is a citizen board similar to the EPC that provides advice to Arlington officials on a broad range of environmental issues. The event was successful in providing an opportunity for the two organizations to discuss common ground and opportunities for future collaboration.

5. Alexandria Earth Day

Alexandria Earth Day 2010 was celebrated at Ben Brenman Park on April 24th. This year's theme was "Teach – Learn – Live Green!" More than 1,100 people attended the event, undeterred by the forecast for wet weather. Attendees enjoyed live music and a puppet show,

while the City Arborist held another successful tree sale. City departments, local businesses and non-profit organizations provided educational displays and hands-on activities for all ages. Exhibitors were required to sign a zero-waste contract in order to participate in the event in an effort to recycle or compost all waste materials.

An exciting new aspect to this year's event was the enthusiastic participation of Alexandria City Public Schools. There are eighteen schools in the ACPS system and seventeen took part in Earth Day and the eighteenth played its part in the Proclamation reading in City Hall before the event. Each school was asked to create an engaging display that captured the many environmental projects underway at their specific school. A panel of judges evaluated each school with respect to their environmental curriculum, facility management practices and student activities. Two winners were chosen: the William Ramsay Elementary School and the Northern Virginia Juvenile Detention Home. Each school received a \$500 prize to spend on additional environmental projects.

Ellen Pickering Environmental Excellence Award

In FY09, the EPC partnered with the Alexandria Sanitation Authority (ASA) to establish the Ellen Pickering Environmental Excellence Award. This is the first award program in Alexandria to formally recognize outstanding citizens who have demonstrated their commitment to protecting the natural environment and promoting sustainability. In addition to citizens, an Alexandria group, club, organization or corporate neighbor were also eligible to be nominated. The award is named in honor of Frances Ellen Pickering's lifelong dedication to preservation and conservation in the City of Alexandria.

As part of the annual Earth Day celebration, the EPC and ASA announced the selection of Ms. Montie Kust as the recipient of the second annual award. Ms. Kust, a resident of Alexandria since 1957, has continually opened her nearly three-acre property to educators, environmentalists, birders, and everyday citizens. In 2006, she created a conservation easement over her property in order to protect it as a nature reserve. Ms. Kust hosts several public-outreach events on her property every year, including invasive plant-pull parties and garden tours. Box turtles, whose numbers continue to fall throughout Virginia, thrive on Ms. Kust's land. Now 88 years old, Ms. Kust continues to work for a more ecologically healthy and beautiful world. A tree was planted in honor of Ms. Kust during Alexandria Earth Day 2010.